DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 292 CG 018 393

AUTHOR James, Jacquelyn B.; Speisman, Joseph C.
TITLE Maternal Identity, Occupational Identity and Parental Awareness in Mothers.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Mental Health (DHHS), Rockville, MD.
PUB DATE Mar 85
GRANT NIMH-MH-31719
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (Boston, MA, March 21-24, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Dual Career Family; *Employed Parents; Family Relationship; *Maturity (Individuals); *Mothers; Parent Child Relationship; Parent Role; *Role Perception; Self Concept

ABSTRACT

The quality of parenting in dual career families has been the subject of much debate. To determine whether employed and non-employed mothers, varying in psychological identity status (parental and occupational), differ in the maturity of their perspectives on children and the parent role, 37 married women with children were interviewed. The interviews were conducted using the Parental Awareness Interview and a revised version of Marcia's (1966) semi-structured identity interview to determine occupational and parental identity. Data analyzed by one-way ANOVA's showed that there were no significant differences between the employed and non-employed groups in the parental identity, the occupational identity, or the parental awareness domains. The data presented suggest that without adequate replacement for a mother's nurturing, some mothers express conflict about developing an occupational identity. (KGB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED259292

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Maternal Identity, Occupational Identity and Parental Awareness in Mothers

Jacquelyn B. James

and

Joseph C. Speisman

Boston University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jacquelyn B. James

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 018393

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Boston, Massachusetts, March, 1985.

The study on which this report is based was supported by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (MH 31719). Our thanks go to Daryl Costos for her assistance with data analysis.

Abstract

The quality of parenting in dual career families has been the subject of much debate. While some professionals (Fraiberg, 1977; White, 1975) suggest that children need a "loving mother at home," others (Hoffman, 1974; Skard, 1973) propose that the impact on children of a working mother has more to do with how she goes about making her choices regarding work and family than with whether or not she works outside the home. The purpose of the current study was to determine whether employed and non-employed mothers varying in psychological statuses of identity (parental and occupational) differed in the maturity of their perspectives on children and the parent role. Subjects for this study were 37 married women with children, all of whom were participants in a longitudinal study of family relationships (White, Speisman and Costos, 1983). Three independent varibles were selected: (1) mother's occupational status (full-time homemaking or employed either full or part time; (2) mother's status in Marcia's occupational identity scale and (3) mother's status in parental identity, determined by an adaptation of Marcia's scale. Data were analyzed by one-way ANOVA's, with stage scores on the Parental Awareness Interview (Newberger, 1977) as the dependent variable. There were no statistically significant differences found but some interesting descriptive findings regarding maternal employment and identity were illuminated.

Maternal Identity, Occupational Identity and Parental Awareness in Mothers

Jacquelyn Boone James

The issue of maternal employment, while subject to empirical research for several decades now, has been and continues to be laden with political and emotional overtones. Some authors (Yudkin & Holme, 1963; Nye, 1963; Gold, 1961) link maternal employment to negative outcomes for children while others (Almquist & Angrist, 1971; Birnbaum, 1971; Ginzberg, 1971) report positive outcomes. A number of studies (Olds,1977; Kagan,1974) revealed no differences between the children of employed and non-employed mothers. Hoffman (1974) suggests that these studies are missing the point. Surely, she says, what mothers do and do not do has some impact on their children, but the focus on whether the quality of parenting is improved as a result of at-home availability or diminished as a result of outside employment leaves out many other contributing factors; the mother's attitude about what she does, her social class, her family circumstances, the age and sex of the child, the availability and kinds of childcare arrangements, etc., are all important to the considerations of maternal and child functioning. The purpose of this paper was to consider the impact of selected psychological variables on parental functioning.

Hoffman's work (1974) has been extremely valuable in pointing out the complexity of the relationship which is likely to exist between maternal employment and parent and child outcomes. One set of issues that has not particularly been addressed concerns the process by which a mother makes the decision to seek (or not seek) paid employment. Working with constructs from Erikson (1963), Marcia (1966) has identified crisis and commitment as components in the process of identity development. If, as Erikson suggests, identity

development is linked to generativity, which includes "procreativity" or involvement with children as well as "productive" work, then measures of a woman's identity status should be related to generativity development. This is the issue we have been exploring, using Marcia's (1966) measure of ego identity (as related to occupation) whether it be homemaking or paid employment and Newberger's (1977) measure of parental awareness (used to assess generativity).

Expanding on Hoffman's suggestion concerning the meaning of employment/non-employment for the mother we found, in an earlier study (James & White, 1983) that satisfaction (as measured by commitment) to one's status (employment/non-employment) was positively associated with level of parental awareness in a sample of women whose work status was determined on the basis of information volunteered regarding employment status in an in-depth interview. However, when area of primary commitment (employment/homemaking) was decided on the basis of the woman's initial response to a demographic questionnaire, (Patrych & James, 1984) commitment was not associated with levels of parental awareness.

In our investigation of employment, identity and parental awareness, we have had two major problems which may be inherent in studies concerning maternal employment. First commitment as a measure of the meaning of a component of identity seemed incomplete. Women may be highly committed to an occupation even if the meaning of that choice is not clear to them. High commitment can result from following the directives of parents, husbands and/or culture in general. In Marcia's terms, (1966) these women would be referred to as foreclosed: they have committed themselves to an occupation without seriously examining alternatives. Too, high commitment and

satisfaction might result from a perceived lack of better alternatives. Further, satisfaction and commitment alone may not necessarily reflect higher levels of psychological functioning. Consider the woman who is very satisfied with her career and is so committed to it that all other aspects of her life must be subjugated to it. Moreover, even satisfied, committed working women have been shown to experience guilt and role strain (Birnbaum, 1971), which could affect other endeavors, like parenting.

The second and more vexing problem facing us in our study of women's work and parenting was the effort involved in placing women in one employment category (employed/non-employed) or another. On our demographic questionnaire, the responses to "what is your current occupation?" ranged from "unlabelled" to "homemaker" to any number of employed positions. Then, in the course of our identity interview with those mothers some "homemakers" were found to be the sole manager of a family business, full-time students, authors and consultants. Likewise, some mothers who mentioned occupations in the questionnaire, disclosed in the course of the interview that they viewed their current status to be at-home mother. Eighteen out of thirty-seven mothers reported two positions - wife/mother and some job.

It occurred to us then that mothers' commitments were not just based on commitments to one domain or the other (mothering-working) but that they could be highly committed to both, or one or the other, or neither; and that measures of both areas of commitment might be very revealing as to how decisions were made regarding work and family.

Since our earlier scoring of commitment (James & White, 1983; Patrych & James, 1984) seemed incomplete, a more telling score might be one that included the process by which those commitments were made.

More specifically, were the mothers identity achieved, foreclosed, in moratorium or diffuse according to Marcia's (1966) identity statuses? Was there crisis followed by resolution and commitment? Had the mother examined other possibilities in making decisions regarding her occupation and/or her parent role and had she made conscious choices? It is suggested that the presence or absence of these variables of mature psychological functioning would predict to more mature levels of parental functioning.

As for the impact of maternal employment on children, investigators have examined a number of child attributes as "outcome measures" (Howell, 1973; Kagan, 1974). When differences are found between children of employed and children of unemployed mothers (Yarrow, Scott, DeLeeuw, & Heinig, 1962; Birnbaum, 1971), differences generally are assumed to be a function of what mothers do or fail to do with their children. Seldom have maternal parenting behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes been assessed directly. Just as it is important that researchers begin to consider such variables as the mother's identity development status, it is important to assess dimensions of parenting directly.

One useful approach to dimensions of parenting stems from Newberger's work (1977) in parental awareness. While Newberger says that knowledge of parental conceptions is insufficient for generalizing to parent behavior, her findings suggest that "low parental conceptions might be implicated in poor parenting behavior in general. . .and parents who reason at a low level may be more vulnerable to the expression of behavior harmful to the child when experiencing stress" (p. 79).

In Newberger's Parental Awareness Stage theory, there is a hierarchy of four descriptive developmental levels of parental

conceptions in ascending order of maturity of perspectives. Examined are the parent's conceptions of the child as a person, the parent-child relationship, and the parent role. The four levels are briefly described below:

Level 1 characterizes egoistic parental thinking in which the child is viewed predominantly in relation to the parent's needs. While intentions of the child are recognized, they are a projection of the parent's feelings and are not separated from actions. The goal of childrearing is to have the child be what the parent wants him to be and to have him/her behave so as not to embarrass the parent.

Level 2 characterizes conventional parental conceptions. This parent operates with pre-conceived, externally derived expectations. While the child's internal state is acknowledged, the child is not seen as unique but as a stereotype of all children. Parenting is seen as the fulfillment of role obligation.

Level 3 characterizes "subjective-individualistic parental conceptions. At this level the child is viewed as a person with her or his own subjective reality. The parent focuses on understanding the child by trying to see the world through the child's eyes and through a relationship characterized by a mutual emotional exchange. The parent places emphasis on his/her response to the child as a unique person and not what makes for correct practices in childrearing.

Level 4 characterizes analytic parental conceptions in which the child is understood as a "complex psychological self-system." The parent at this level accepts that the intent underneath a child's actions may reflect simultaneous and conflicted feelings. The focus is on the continued process of growing and changing as individuals in relationship. "Reciprocity is built not only on shared feelings, but also on shared acceptances of each others faults and frailties as well as virtues, and each other's separateness, as well as closeness." (Newberger, 1977, p. 115)

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether mothers who are more mature in their approach to work and family are also more mature in their perspective on their children and their parent role.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects for this study were thirty-seven married women with children, all of whom were participants in a longitudinal study of family relationships (White, Speisman, & Costos, 1983). They ranged in age from 24 to 31 and their children's ages ranged from less than one year to nine years old. The length of marriage ranged from 1 to 10 years.

The measure used for determining occupational and parental

identity, the independent variables, was a revised version of Marcia's (1966) semi- structured identity interview. The main objective for rating each interview was to locate each person in one of four "identity statuses," each status being a "mode involved in coping" with the identity crisis of deciding upon and committing oneself to what one is to be in terms of their occupation and th ideology around parenting. The four identity statuses are: Identity Achievement, Moratorium, Foreclosure and Identity Diffusion. The two referents for determining Identity Status were "crisis," referring to a struggle, a period of decision, and "commitment," referring to a "certain unwaveringness of choice, a reluctance to abandon a path set out upon." (Marcia, 1966, p.1) In the occupational domain, the statuses were determined by Marcia's scoring system. In the parental identity domain, Marcia's criteria were adapted to account for the subject's parental ideology, when it seemed evident from the interview.

Identity Achieved refers to the individual who has passed through a decision period or crisis and appears commited to her occupation and/or her parental ideology.

Moratorium refers to the individual who is presently in a crisis period and is actively trying to make up her mind; commitments are likely to be vague and general.

Foreclosure refers to the individual who does not seem to have passed through any real decision period, but nevertheless appears committed to her occupation. Choices may coincide with those of her parents whom she does not seriously question.

Identity Diffusion refers to the individual who has either experienced no crisis or has passed through a crisis. In either case there is little, if any, commitment. It is important to note that

commitment in the parental domain does not refer to commitment to being a parent or even to one's children; rather, to one's decision regarding what kind of parent one chooses to be.

Scores on the Parental Awareness Interview (Newberger,1980) constituted the dependent variable. The format of this measure is that of a semi- structured reflective interview, which permits both standard questions and elaboration and expansion by the respondent. The interviewer was expected to facilitate or probe, pushing for clarification of ideas and for the reasons behind answers to questions. It is in the reasons for a parent's opinions and beliefs that the deeper structures of awareness are thought to be revealed. A level 1,2,3 or 4 was assigned to each subject's responses to questions designed to cover a broad range of parental tasks assumed to be usual and critical in child rearing. The issues were as follows:

"1. Identifying influences on development and behavior (elements in the child, the environment, and in their interaction that affect the child's behavior and development.)

2. Understanding subjectivity- thinking and feeling (the nature of the subjective experience of the child and how it is identified.)

3. Defining personality (qualities and characteristics that make up personality; defining the ideal child.)

4. Establishing and maintaining communication and trust (closeness, reciprocity, and sharing.)

5. Resolving conflict (identifying and addressing conflict between parent and child and between child and child.)

6. Establishing and maintaining discipline and authority (the reasons and methods for the socialization of children.)

7. Meeting needs (defining and addressing needs.)

8. Learning and evaluating parenting (how parenting is learned;

evaluating parental performance.)" (Newberger, 1980, pp.48,49)

Scoring for the Marcia occupational identity statuses and the parental awareness levels was done by trained reliable scorers. The parental identity scoring was done through an adaption of the Marcia scoring system in an exploratory way by the investigator. Procedure

Each mother was given four scores: (1) diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium or achieved for maternal identity; (2) diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium or achieved for employment identity; (3) an employment status score- employed or homemaking (as revealed in interview) and finally (4) a parental awareness score based on Newberger's social cognitive scoring system.

RESULTS

Parental Awareness scores for this sample ranged from 1.4-3.0 with a mean score of 2.08. Parental Identity scores were available for 30 of the subjects and ranged from 2-4 with a mean of 3.37. Two thirds of the subjects received a score of 4. Occupational Identity ranged from 1-4 with a mean of 2.84. In our sample there were 15 homemakers and 22 employed women.

For the Parental Identity data, since there were no subjects in the diffuse category and only one subject in the [illegible]torium category a one-way ANOVA was performed employing two groups [illegible]rental identity statuses (achieved and foreclosed) as the independent variables and subjects' parental awareness score as the dependent variable. No significant differences were found ($F=.29$, $p<.59$).

For the Occupational Identity data a one-way ANOVA was performed employing four groups of identity statuses (identity achieved, foreclosed, moratorium, and diffuse) as the independent variables and subjects' parental awareness scores as the dependent variable. Again no significant differences were found ($F=.576$, $p<.56$).

As predicted, there were no significant differences between the employed/non-employed groups in the parental identity, the occupational identity or the parental awareness domains.

DISCUSSION

This project represents an extensive effort to understand the relationship between women's identity and parental awareness. Three times and in three different ways the relevant data have been analyzed (James & White, 1983; Patrych & James, 1984) and still the results that many would predict are not there. Why this is so is not really clear. There are, however, a few possible explanations and some interesting descriptive findings as well.

One possible explanation for our inability to find a consistent relationship between identity and generativity (i.e. parental awareness) might lie in the ages and stages of development of this group of mothers. Their ages ranged from 24-31. Almost all of the mothers could be described as being in the early stages of childrearing.

Fifteen of the mothers had only one child, 18 had two children and only 4 mothers had 3 children. Most of the children were pre-schoolers. If Newberger is correct in viewing parental awareness as a developmental maturity scale and most of these parents were in the beginning stages of parenting, then the scores presented here portray an accurate picture of early stages in parental conceptions. Scores ranged from 1.4-3.0; the median score was 2.02. In Newberger's system, a level 2 score is referred to as conventional, reflecting the parent's tendency to draw from cultural sources (their parents, authorities, books, etc.) for information regarding parenting. Her theory would suggest that as the parent and child mature, the parent

is more likely to gather information about parenting from the uniqueness of the child and/or the quality of the parent-child relationship. Few of the parents in our study were at the post-conventional stages, and again, this is perhaps an expectable finding, given the relative youth of the group.

In the identity domain are methodological problems as well. Marcia's (1966) identity measure and scoring system was originally designed for adolescent males. Further, his notion of identity achievement was that it was stable - once achieved a person is expected to stay achieved. In a follow-up study of his 1966 sample, Marcia (1976) found subjects who had previously been scored as Achieved were now scored as Foreclosed, a finding which is logically inconsistent with his system. Later, Waterman (1980) revised the measure in order to use it with adults and added questions pertinent to women, however, he kept Marcia's notion of crisis and commitment as the defining criteria for the four identity statuses. It would appear from Marcia's follow-up study that these statuses were not well-designed for adults. Levinson (1978) has argued that identity is not stable; rather it is a more amorphous phenomenon that gets structured and re-structured throughout the life course. Crisis and commitment may be good ways of getting at the early stage of identity development in adolescence but they may not be the best conceptual tools for assessing identity in adults, particularly adult women.

Clearly the women in this sample revealed evidence of some conflict around occupational identity that made the scoring problematic. Twenty- six of thirty-seven women viewed their major occupation as "mothering." Some of these 26 women were also otherwise employed! Only two of the homemakers viewed making a nice home to be their job. In fact, most of them reported their disdain for the

housekeeping aspect of their job. One thing these women were not saying was, "I'm just a housewife!" Many of the women felt that proper nurturing of their children could only be accomplished by the mother herself. Many proffered their derogatory views of day care and of "someone else raising the kids." In fact, several of the employed mothers worked only hours when children were in school or when husbands were home. All but one of the homemakers planned to resume or find work when the children entered school. Most of the women described a longing, not just for a job, but a "career" in their future. Five felt they had found this career; others were in the process of being trained for it, and some viewed the early childrearing at-home years as a time to explore a range of possibilities before committing to a career.

The women investigated here envisioned a present and/or a future of being co-providers with their husbands. Many of them reported cooperation and support from their husbands toward that end. Jessie Bernard's (1981) ideal family of co-providers where "both find part-time positions and work out flexible work schedules that leave both of them time for child care and companionship with one another" (p.12) is, she admits, a rare occurence even today. Citing Chafe, Bernard, (1981) says that social and economic institutions do not encourage or even make possible such an arrangement. She equates the processes involved in the kind of ideal role change described above with those involved in deprogramming a cult member. Such conflict between role change and occupational identity for women seem to be reflected here. Is "mothering" an occupation? How many fathers would answer "fathering" to the question: "What is your current occupation?" The data presented here seem to suggest that without adequate replacement for the role of mothering, some mothers express conflict about

developing an occupational identity. Recent studies (O'Connell, 1976) do show that some women hold their occupational identity in moratorium until marriage has taken place and the the children have been "launched". The measures used here may not adequately assess the process by which women, mothers in particular, grow in that domain.

References

Almquist, E. M., and Angrist, S. S. (1971). Role model influences on college women's career aspirations. Merill-Palmer Quarterly, 17, 263-279.

Birnbaum, J.A. (1971). Life patterns, personality style and self esteem in gifted family oriented and career committed women. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Michigan.

Erikson, E. H. and Erikson, J. M. (1981). On generativity and identity. Harvard Educational Review. 51.

Gold, M. (1961). A social-psychology of delinquent boys. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research.

Ginzberg, E. (1971) Educated american women: Life styles and self portraits. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hoffman L. W., and Nye, F. I. (1974) Working mothers. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

James, J. and White, K. (1973) Employed and non-employed mothers: the relationship between career status, identity commitment and parental awareness. New England Psychological Association.

Kagan, J., Kearsley, R., and Zelazo, P. (1976). The effects of infant daycare on psychological development. Cambridge: J. Kagan.

Levinson, D. J. (1978). The seasons of a man's life. New York: Knopf.

Marcai, J.E. (1966) Development and validation of ego identity status. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3, 551-558.

Marcia, J.E. (1976). Identity status interview. Unpublished manuscript.

Newberger, C. M. (1977). Parental conceptions of children and child-rearing: structural-developmental analysis. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.

Newberger, C. M. (1980). The cognitive sturcture of parenthood: designing a descriptive measure. New Directions for Child Development, 7, pp. 45-67.

Nye, F. I. (1963). The adjustment of adolescent children. In F.I. Nye and L.W. Hoffman (Eds.), The employed mother in America. Chicago: Rand McNally.

O'Connell, A. (1975) The relationship between life style and identity synthesis and re-synthesis in traditional, neo-traditional and nontraditional women. Paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association, New York.

Olds, S. (1977) When mommy goes to work. Family Health Today, February, p. 122-124.

Patrych, C. and James, J. (1984). Occupational commitment as related to parental awareness. An unpublished paper. Boston University.

Sobol, M. G. (1974). Commitment to work. In F. I. Nye and L. W. Hoffman (Eds.), Working mothers. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tangri, S.S. (1969). Role-innovation in occupational choice among college women. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan.

Yarrow, M.R., Scott, P., DeLeeuw, L. and Heinig, C. (1962) Childrearing in families of working and non-working mothers. Sociometry, 25, 122-140.

Yudkin, S. and Holmes, A. (1963). Working mothers and their children. London: Michael Joseph.

Waterman, A. (1980). Ego identity status among married adult women. A paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association.

White, K. M., Speisman, J. C.- and Costos, D. (1983). Young adults and their parents: Individuation to mutuality. In Grotevant, H. (Ed.), New Directions in Developmental Psychology.